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Skagit Valley Herald

Cook Road farmers oppose levee plan

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MOUNT VERNON – Although Skagit County residents were invited to present their opinions on the proposed flood control project at a public meeting last week, Cook Road area residents voiced their concerns to officials Monday.

In a meeting with the Skagit County Commissioners and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, about 30 residents of the Cook Road area and Samish basin indicated they were not satisfied with alternative 3E, the flood control plan that the Corps considers most feasible for the county.

Some members of the group, which represented “6,000 to 7,000 acres”, expressed a preference for a Sauk River control dam or channel dredging.

Although the project would increase protection to that area from 40 to 50-year level floods, the farmers felt their area would be the first to receive flood waters and wanted to know how they would be compensated for any damages.

As proposed, alternative 3E, with a series of rural and urban levee improvements, would give 50-year flood level protection to the rural areas downstream of Mount Vernon and in the Cook Road area. Burlington, west Mount Vernon and Avon would receive 100-year protection, with urban Mount Vernon receiving 500-year protection.

Flood control sills rather than a concrete weir structure would be located at Sterling Hill, and the natural ground divide would be raised to compensate for higher water depths.

If the project is implemented, Forest Brooks, Skagit study manager for the Corps, said conditions would remain the same in the Cook Road area through a 10-year flood. At the 20-year level, water would begin to cross the railroad tracks and fill the area to the rise that divides the Skagit and Samish valleys.

A dike proposed for the District Line Road would prevent flood waters from backing into the area near United General Hospital.

Flood waters won't cross the rise until they reach the 50-year level, Brooks said. At present, the area has 40-year level protection.

In a 100-year flood event, the area would receive the same amount of flooding as under existing conditions, Brooks said.

“You keep saying it isn't going to be worse,” one man said. “But there's going to be some real damage to some places in the Samish Flats area. What will be done for those people?”

“I'm getting ready to build a new barn,” said another man. “You tell me how

high to make my ground fill. That's what I'm interested in."

Several said their tax dollars would be used for a project that would give protection to most the county, but not this area. Commissioner Howard Miller reminded them they would be receiving 50-year protection like most the other farming areas.

The Corps has proposed several measures to lessen the impact of flooding, but only for residents who will receive increased flood waters as a result of the project.

Some of those present favored alternative 3D, which would run a levee from Sterling to Sedro-Woolley. But Brooks said this had no chance of obtaining Congressional authorization because of its poor cost-benefit ratio.

This alternative would give farmland in the Samish Valley 100-year protection, increasing pressure to develop, he said. In addition, it would send more water into the Nookachamps area, which already will be adversely affected by the proposed project. And it would require raising several bridges.

The Sauk River containment structure and dredging were brought up again, and Brooks again explained why they are not considered possible alternatives.

A dam on the Sauk would not be allowed because of the inclusion of the Skagit River and its tributaries in the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers system.

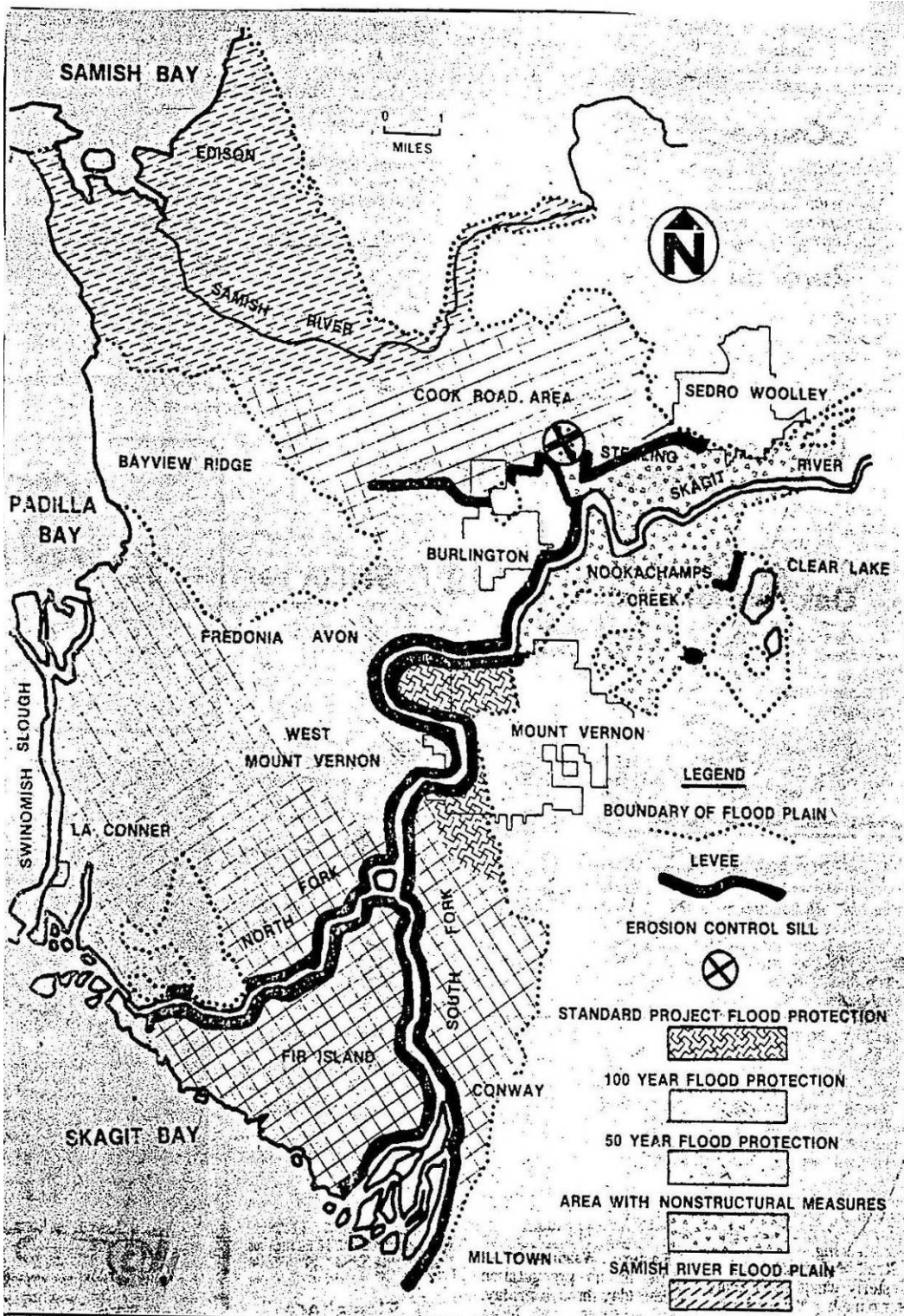
"We have senior representatives in government back East," one man said. "Don't you think their influence would make an effect on their colleagues?"

Dredging also is not feasible because of the high cost of maintenance, Brooks said. The channel would have to be dredged every year or two, and could have detrimental effects on the environment.

In a show of hands, most indicated they preferred no flood control project to 3E,

contrary to a vote taken at a meeting in Allen in April when most voted for some sort of flood control project rather than nothing.

Commissioner Bud Norris told the group he understood their concerns, and will discuss them further with the Corps. The Corps is expected to submit a final project recommendation to higher authorities in July.



PROPOSED FLOOD CONTROL — Shown above is flood control plan 3E with recent modifications intended to lessen project-induced damages. Mount Vernon east of the river will receive protection from floods with a one-in-500-year chance of occurrence. West Mount Vernon and

Burlington will receive 100-year flood level protection. Other areas will receive 50-year protection or some form of compensation. The weir has been replaced by erosion control sills. A public meeting on the proposal is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Tuesday.